

Comparative Woman

Volume 1 *Spirituality*


Article 6

12-31-2018

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Recommended Citation

Johnston, Jaime Elizabeth (2018) "My Mother on Dream Interpretation and the Lack of Finality in Death," *Comparative Woman*: Vol. 1 , Article 6.

DOI: 10.31390/comparativewoman.1.1.05

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/comparativewoman/vol1/iss1/6>

My Mother on Dream Interpretation and the Lack of Finality in Death Liz Johnston

When some kids are younger, their mothers read them bedtime stories. Mine read my dreams. I grew up with the belief that sometimes dreams can reveal to an individual a great deal of pertinent information about herself. Sometimes dreams warn us of the future or reveal who we are in the present. Sometimes dreams connect us to the past and other times to those who have passed. I use the word “passed,” because I have had a lifelong struggle in dealing with the concept of death. While some may groan that they have an overbearing family, I am thankful that mine keeps coming around— long after they have taken their last breath.

One night in December 2018, I sat down in the living room with my mother to interview her about dreams and the almost too “natural” occurrences of my family’s brush with the “supernatural.”

My mother, now 59 years old, was wearing a pink sweatshirt with snowy green mountains on it that her mother had given to her before I was born. We both agreed that it was the ugliest sweatshirt we had ever seen. She was in the process of making my dad’s dinner, which she said consisted of “pork-n-beans, his favorite, and rice, and baked chicken— and brownies—because I am addicted to sweets,” so I asked her to sit down with me to do this interview.

DREAM READING

“Do you know why I’m interviewing you?” I asked.

“Because you want to spend time doing something while you’re waiting on the brownies?” she said. We laughed. She continued, “You’re interviewing me asking me about dream interpretations.”

My mother described the act of interpreting dreams as “just allowing someone to tell you about their dream and then you try to explain the significance of the dream, and what they can take from it. And it’s sort of a spiritual way of explaining what the dream means and what the purpose of the dream is...”

I think that for many people, the phrase “dream interpretation,” elicits a feeling of 1970s-1990s sleep-over fads where young girls share dreams about their crushes and flip through mass-marketed “dream dictionary” books to pick out the symbolism. However, this was never the way my mother did it. For my mom, dream interpretation is spiritual.

“I think, for me, because I pray and I believe it is a gift from God to be able to understand what a dream means, and be able to explain it to a person so that hopefully it helps you in life: To accomplish a goal, or to prevent them from harm, or to enlighten them in some way,” she said.

“So where does the interpretation come from? Is it just a feeling?” I asked.

“I pray and ask God for the insight and understanding to get what the dream is about, and the purpose of the dream, to be able to explain it to the individual that’s telling me about the dream, and there have been times when I prayed and I’ve realized that people are not telling me the full dream, or they are making up stuff and the spirit of God lets me know that too.”

She continued, “There was a particular person that wanted to sort of give me a message in their own way, and so they told me that they had a dream about something and as this person was talking, the spirit of God revealed to me that this was not a dream that they had, that they were just—like the young people say— throwing shade. So, I told them that I could not interpret

that dream, so from then on whenever they came to me with a dream I choose not to even attempt to interpret because I did not trust them to be forthcoming so I chose not to interpret with them anymore because they weren't a sincere person."

I was curious about God's ability to call out "shade" to my mother. I asked her, "How do you know when God is talking to you?" She told me, "It's the same way that the spirit of God talks to me, the holy spirit, talks to me about everything in life—because I take the time to just pray, and read, and just listen because a lot of times people pray and don't listen for a response, or if they hear it, they decide that that's not what they want to do after all. So, in taking the time to have a relationship with God, which is what I believe Christianity is about partly, so I hear it, I feel it, I know it, I don't know if I can explain it, but it's like this strong sense of— what is it—the Spirit coming over you? It feels different when it's something that is good or something that is not good. It's a lighter feeling when something is good, it's a heavier feeling when something is not good. Sometimes it's like a burning feeling."

I asked her what the "good feeling felt like," and she said, "Peace, it feels like peace." As for the bad feeling, "It feels worrisome, troublesome-- gloomy, maybe?"

This struck my curiosity. A lot of people "feel things." Emotions are a natural part of being human. How can one differentiate between the everyday feeling of happiness, anxiety, sadness, or joy? I asked my mother about this she responded, "Oh, that's just, it is different. I guess when you're happy about something, you may laugh about something and smile. This is just an inner peace, it's just an inner peace of knowing and the same with when something is not good, it's a disturbance. It's like a burning— I don't know. I don't know, it's a different feeling."

DEVELOPING A GIFT

The practice of dream interpretation is so rooted in "feeling," for my mother. I wondered how she felt about her ability. She described dream interpretation as, "a gift." This "gift" of her's has always been a part of my life. Reading dreams always felt normal in my family. I remember people coming over when I was a kid or calling her on the phone to ask her to interpret their dreams. My sister's ex-boyfriend often would call my mother to ask her to explain a dream. I myself interpret dreams, but even I refer to my mother for a second opinion when I interpret for others. Because dream interpretation was something that we both shared, I wondered if it was hereditary. I asked her if she was born with the gift. She told me that it probably started in her late twenties, she said:

"...people used to always ask me to pray for them all the time and I would pray for them and people would come back to me and say 'Oh great, thank you for praying for me! This happened, that happened!' There have been times where there were people I haven't seen for years, and I'm praying and suddenly I'd see their face, or the thought of them would come to mind and I knew it was time to pray for them, what specific thing to pray about for them, so when people that I do know have asked me to pray for them, and the specific thing they ask me to pray for, as I'm praying I can hear the spirit of God say that's not what they need, this is what I need to be praying about."

I asked her for an example. She seemed reluctant to tell me but did so anyway: "For example, a person asked me to pray that they and their husband get back together and as I'm praying and I could hear the spirit saying 'that person that they're with is no good for them, God has something better in store for them.' And so, he instructs me to pray for them to have strength and wisdom to recognize that and pray for them to move forward rather than praying they get back together."

“So, this is all about a deep relationship with God, then? How did you develop that?” I asked.

“Lots of prayer, lots of studying, lots of just talking to God everyday –as I talk to my children, my husband— just speaking to God the same way I speak to everyone else, but just opening myself up to hear what he’s saying to me even if it’s something I don’t want to do or don’t have the courage to do, I’m listening to what he’s saying to me and it’s just as any other relationship over time.”

READING DREAMS

My mother’s process is fairly simple: Ask and tell. First, she listens to the person explain their dream, sometimes she asks questions to get more details. Then, in prayer, she asks God to reveal the meaning to her. She said that she does not always understand every part of the dream, but she does what she can.

Sometimes, the message is very simple, she said, “A person said to me that they keep having this dream of going to the post office and something happened, and I told them that they have some important mail that they were neglecting, and that was a simple thing that they needed to go to the post office— and they chose not to, and it turns out they were getting a lot of bills for the electricity and they did not go to the post office to get it, and they ended up with their lights being turned off.”

Often, dreams communicate warnings. Life can be overwhelming for many, sometimes people forget to attend to important, but small aspects of their lives and dreams can help in warning us to get back on track— almost like little memos from the subconscious.

However, dreams are not always communicating small messages of what we have left off to-do lists. My mother recalls, “There were people that had dreams that they were in a field of grass, and they were seeing a lot of green, and that’s usually a dream that’s significant with someone that’s coming in to some money. There were people that had dreams of being in gold, or dressed in gold, and it depends on the kind of gold, and in this particular case it was like a yellow gold, which usually signifies something bad that’s going to happen but it’s going to work out for your good eventually. It basically symbolizes God trying to do something with you, teach you a lesson, but it may be a hard lesson, but it will work out in the end. Then, if you dream of gold as in wheat, a lot of wheat and stuff, that seems to be God moving you to a different place, moving you in another direction. Gold usually seems to be something to do with God or the glory of God or Him changing things in your life.”

Dreams can also help us connect to or help others.

“Sometimes people have had dreams of being in the place, like their own house, but everything is opposite, like their door may be on the other side of the house when it’s usually on the left side, now it’s on the right side... the front of the house is on the back of the house, it’s basically saying that whatever is happening to the person in the dream, it’s going to be the opposite. If you dream it’s happening to a man, then it’s going to happen to a woman... so it’s like the opposite.”

I asked if she knew why. She responded, “I couldn’t tell you why it’s like that other than to help you understand it’s going to be the opposite thing. So maybe it’s because if you perceive this thing is happening to you, then you are kind of afraid of it, then you’re not going to want to receive it, but if it’s happening to someone else then you’re better able to deal with it maybe, in actuality it’s a warning of something coming for you or something happening in your life...”

“For example?” I asked.

“Oh gosh, can I say my mom?” she said.

“Sure.”

“She’s had dreams where she was in church, and something was happening in the back, and it happened to someone else. But, that person was male so that’s the most that I can tell you about that right now. These are things that I am recalling from some time ago.”

“What are some recent dreams that you have interpreted?”

“It’s been awhile. Sometimes, I try to interpret my own dreams”

“And how does that go?”

We both laughed, and then she said, “Since I’m sort of being an insomniac lately, I can’t really remember a lot of my dreams when I do have them—yeah it goes pretty well actually... If I know I’m going to be getting some money, or something else.” She continued, “Sometimes, you’ll have dreams years ahead of time and then things don’t take place for years, and then you remember as you’re driving by something that you saw in a dream before you ever saw it before—I dreamed about moving out here [to Luling, LA from New Orleans, LA] and I could see that school that you went to in grade school, I could see that field that was across the street from it [there was a fenced in field of cows across from the school]. I saw that in a dream, but I had never seen that actual place before you went to school there and then I saw it one day and realized that it was the same place that I had seen that in a dream. I used to pray all the time that I could find a better school for you, and God was showing me that he had a better place for you. It took a while, but we did and it’s worked out great for you.”

“Why do you think people dream things that tell them about their lives?”

“Maybe to give them hope. In some cases, maybe to give a warning—they need to prepare themselves even if they can’t prevent it.”

“Where do the messages come from,” I asked?

“Some people say it’s some things that are in your subconscious. I think it’s just God warning you, the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit warning you, and sometimes, it’s just stuff you see on T.V. coming back into your subconscious. Sometimes, it’s our own fears that just—I guess—cultivate these sorts of dreams.”

“Do you consider yourself to be a very spiritual person?”

“Yeah, I think so”

“In what way?”

“In just taking the time to speak to God, hear God, listen, being observant of the things around me, being able to feel God’s presence, being able to feel the spirit of other people, being able to discern the spirit of other people. Yeah, I think that I am spiritual.”

“Do you consider yourself a religious person?” I asked.

“Religious in the terms of practicing rituals of a certain religion? No. ‘True religion, undefiled, feed the sick, help the poor, feed the hungry,’ I would like to do that much more than what I do. I give to certain things [charities] but I’d like to be part of doing more of what I believe religion really is... I saw something on T.V. and it was something that said ‘do church differently’ or ‘think of church differently,’ other than just sitting in a building. I think church is more about helping other people. I think that’s a better representation of Christ, helping other people, giving, doing, loving others...”

“What are your views on the spirit world?”

“That it exists,” she laughed. “Strongly, it’s always present with us, even if we don’t feel it, even if we aren’t aware of it. I have a hard time explaining how that fits in with some spiritual beliefs, but I can’t ignore the presence of different spirits that I feel and that I’ve seen— so I

don't really know what to do or say about it—but I do know that spirits are present with us at times, and at any moment, you can find yourself present in the spirit or in the spirit world. It's almost like a light that goes on because it happens suddenly, and you can see certain visits with people who you know have 'gone on' and when you're able to see that, it's like you're present in the place where you were, but in a different way. It's like your physical body is there but your spiritual body takes over and its able to see. The spirit sees the other spirit, rather than you seeing with your physical eye, but you see them with your spiritual eyes."

"Can you explain what that's like?"

"It comes on like suddenly, it's not scary for me unless there's somebody that's bad, and even still, because I believe in God—and in the power of the name of Jesus—I have been able to cast out anything that comes my way and see it defeated, but for like family that comes in, it's just like family visiting."

We laughed.

JUST A 'NORMAL' FAMILY VISIT

My mother is not afraid of ghosts—unless they are on television. That is right. My mother is terribly frightened of horror films. She usually cannot get past the first jump scare. However, when it comes to real-life encounters with spirits—especially with our relatives—it's really just another family visit.

"Have you seen a lot of family members who have 'passed on'?" I asked.

"I can go down quite a few of them. The most recent one, that I can recall, is when your grandmother passed, and it was after we had her memorial service that she came. I was sitting in the living room and your dad was sitting in his 'mancave' and I could smell her presence, and he said to me, 'Babe, I can smell my mother,' and I told him I was just about to say that but then I decided not to say anything to him, and he told me he smelled her and then, when I looked over to the door, there she was standing, and she turned around, she had a little smile, and I could feel her peace. She was in complete peace—and I could feel that—and she was pleased. She stood there in the middle of the floor, and she had on that little pink jacket that I bought her and she went out between the door and the window. She did not go out the door. She went between, and she went out—I'm getting these little chills when I think about it—I think she wanted me to know that she wasn't in the 'physical' anymore... but let me say this, I was thinking about when the fact that we had her cremated was sort of traumatic in the sense for me, sort of how people always worried about having someone buried and all, and my sister-in-law suggested that we have the cremation because she said it would be so much more peaceful for the family, and she was so right about that, and so it was like conformation for me that it was ok. This strong sense of peace let me know that it was ok. So, I plan on having cremation when my time comes. And so, I just wanted to say that. That sense of peace that it was so strong and it was so pleasant."

"Have you seen her since," I asked.

"I've not seen her. I'm trying to think about if I had a dream or something about it, but I can't really recall. It was once that I thought I felt her rubbing my hand when I was sick, because I took care of her so much when she was sick, and I think that she might've wanted to return that favor and so it was like I could feel her rubbing my hand, and that was it."

"Did you feel her when I was in the hospital?"

"No, I think that I was way too stressed to really allow myself to feel anything like that? I was just really upset that that situation was going on. I don't think I could even focus on anything else other than you getting out of there," she said.

“Do you think that stress impacts your or anyone’s ability to connect with spirits or--”

“Definitely, because, it’s like— I don’t know if I want to use the word barrier—it prevents you from being open to your own spirit, and it’s really not of God to allow yourself to be stressed out because he wants you to be at peace, and to trust him to work things out so that we really shouldn’t be worried about things all the time, and stressed out all the time, but have to have faith in him and trust in him that no matter how bad it looks, he’s going to work it out in the end. So it’s really not of God to be in fear, so it’s kind of hard for you to allow yourself to connect with him when you’re doing something that’s opposite of what he’s designed and what he wants you to do.”

My mother has also encountered her own grandmother in both the spirit world and in dreams. She said, “When my paternal grandmother passed, I was living in another house in the city, in New Orleans, my oldest daughter was maybe two years old, so you were not yet born—”

“I know,” I laughed. I was well aware of the 13-year gap between my older sister and myself.

“—I was on my knees praying, and suddenly, like a light came on, but it was not a light in the room. It was a presence, and I felt it come through the window, and it stood by me while I was praying, and it put one arm around me like they were waiting for me to finish praying, and without opening my own eyes, I could see my own room that I was praying in, and I could see the shadow figure of that person, and I remember thinking ‘Boy, they sure are short,’ so I continued praying and so I said, ‘God, whoever this is should not be here, tell them to leave in the name of Jesus,’ and they didn’t flee like some other spirit things I’ve seen. They walked to the next room, and they put the cover under my daughter’s arms like an old fashioned way, like the old fashioned way people cover the kids with their arms out over the covers. She went to the other room, covered my daughter, and she left. So, the next morning I awakened to a call from my mother saying that my paternal grandmother’s neighbor had been knocking on her door and that she wasn’t answering, and that they think they could see her through the glass on door laying on the floor. My father went over and they found her on the floor, dead, and that’s when I knew that it was my paternal grandmother that had passed. And she is— was—a very short lady, standing about 4’9”. So, the next night, she came to me in a dream, and she just simply wanted to know that I loved her, because I had not grown up around her because she lived in Milwaukee most of my life and would only visit on occasions, so— in the dream, we were holding hands, and just dancing around together because she was just happy to know that I loved her. And that was that.”

“Do spirits often appear to you in dreams?”

“On occasions. I’ve dreamed about my maternal grandmother on occasion. She usually comes in my dreams when there is something significant about to happen in my life like for example,” she laughed, “like when I knew I was going to be expecting you, I had a dream that she was living in the house across the street, and it was in the opposite direction of the house she used to live in which was across the street and around the corner so in this dream she was living across the street, and down to the left side of the neighborhood, and in the dream I came into the house and she said, ‘let me show you how to take care of a baby,’ and I of course this was over 24 years ago, well before you were born, and so I don’t know why she felt the need to tell me that because I had a kid before, so later on I did find out that I was expecting you... I honestly don’t even recall what it was that she showed me.”

“Tell me more about your grandmother,” I said.

“I had seen her— when she was living we all liked to go ‘goodwill hunting’ [thrift shopping] and she would come with us and at one point she stopped coming because she realized that she could sneak and order food that we didn’t want her to have and so they would bring it to the house, so she would wait until we were gone so she could have it delivered. She used to come with us and she enjoyed it. After she passed, I would see her in different places, and one particular place that I saw her was at the Goodwill and I was shopping, looking through clothing and I looked up and there she was, smiling at me, and I was like, ‘wow, this lady looks just like my grandmother,’ and I kind of just froze, not that I was scared, but I was surprised, I guess to see her. I’ve actually seen your dad’s [step] grandmother since she passed. She used to like to drive her car. Before she got sick, she started losing her sight. She wasn’t completely blind, but she was so bad that she couldn’t drive. So, we’re driving along the bridge someplace and she was driving in her car, and she was so happy, and she as driving along the bridge in her little car and I remember that car because it used to be parked in front of her house. I wasn’t looking for her or expecting to see her or anything like that, but I knew it was her and she was just driving along on the bridge doing something she hasn’t been able to do in ages.”

My mother also remembers when her favorite aunt came to visit. “I remember, and I didn’t see this spirit, but I remember when my aunt passed away, and we just loved her so much—she was one of the main people that ever told me that I was beautiful, that I was pretty... She passed away, and my mom called me to tell me that she had passed, and so we were all sitting in the family room watching something, having a good time, and so I chose not to tell you all right then because y’all were having a good time watching the show. Your dad had his police badge sitting on top of the television, and it had been sitting there all day, and he was going to polish it—that was in those days when he used to have to polish his badge with a brass cleaner— so it was sitting there and suddenly it flew off the television, and you could tell it wasn’t a vibration that knocked it off because—” my mother reached for a blue pen on the table in front of us to demonstrate, “I know y’all can’t see what I’m doing but it was sitting on top of the television and it didn’t fall down like this, it went like that—” and she swooped the pen off the table on to the floor, “—and I knew it was her and it was just to get attention, you know? So eventually, I told y’all what happened and that she had passed.”

“And that was on Aline Street?”

“Yes—Oh, when your sister was little, I saw my great grandfather, the one who was Native American.”

“What’s his name?”

“His American name was Eugene Perkins. I don’t remember his Native name— because they were starting to Americanize themselves. Your sister was just a little baby and I was walking her to the store in her stroller to K&B— which no longer exists— and I think I was going to get some more diapers or milk or something, I don’t know, but we’re walking and I see this man standing at the gate because it was, I believe, one of those iron gates and he’s standing there, and he’s very quiet, and I knew with every part of me that that was my great grandfather, and I’m feeling him and seeing him and I’m thinking, ‘this man really looks like my great—’ the closer I get, the more I realize how much he looks like him, and I am convinced that it’s him, but it can’t be him, so I’m walking and before I get to where he’s actually standing at, he nods his head at me, which is typical of my great grandfather even though I don’t recall him from when I was three when he died. I’ve heard so many stories about him and how much she loved me, so I nodded back and said ‘Hi,’ and he kept staring at the baby— he kept looking at her and his eyes were more fixed on her than me because she probably looked a lot like me when I was that age—

and so as I approached him. I started going faster, and the odd thing that I noticed was that he walked with a limp, and so I had never heard anything about my great grandfather having a limp, and when I got to where he was standing, he was gone, he was walking too slow to have made it to the side porch [of the house he was standing by]. That house had the feeling that there was no one home. It was the middle of the day, the people had probably gone to work, plus he could not have made it up those stairs and into the door, plus I didn't hear a door open. I didn't hear any sound of anything, he just was gone. I told my dad about it and I said 'the only thing about it was this man walked with a limp,' and he said, 'well, Pa had a limp, he had a limp because he had one leg shorter than the other.' They had never told me that. No one had ever told me that he had one leg shorter and that he walked with a limp, and so that was conformation for me that that was him."

My also saw my sister's *parrain* (godfather) after he passed as well. "I saw Mr. Scott, I didn't like see him full on when we were uptown on Aline Street and Mrs. Scott had given me those chairs, and I had the one with arms on it which was his specific chair at the dining table. He came in and sat down on it because I hadn't yet reupholstered the chair. He came in, and he sat down, and he was pleased that I had those chairs." The Scotts' really liked my mom, they were incredibly close, she said they were fond of her and my father, she said, "they sort of were like our mentors and we were close friends with them and she was very pleased that she had given me those chairs. I always kept in touch with them and checked on them."

The visits did not stop when my sister was a child. My mother says that when I was born, we had many visits to our house, "One in particular that I remember were your dad's maternal grandparents [Mary Caton-Olivier and Benoît Edmund Olivier] and I could not see him as well as I could see her, and they came in, and I saw them in the kitchen, but I was not in the kitchen, I was in my bedroom, but for some reason, I was spiritually transported or spiritually able to see them in the kitchen, and the same thing with that like— it's suddenly comes on—and she was pointing to the cabinet at the top where we used to keep the coffee and the significance of that, years ago, she said, 'I'm coming to your house to visit, have me some Community Coffee when I come because I love my Community Coffee,'"— my mother said this last part in a bit of a gruff voice—"she had a very grafty voice," she said, imitating my great grandmother, "'Have me some coffee when I come; I love Community Coffee,' so I bought some coffee and for years," my mother began to laugh, "I kept that coffee! She came, and I don't know why I didn't throw that coffee away because it was like years, and I had it in the cabinet at the top and none of us drank coffee and it was just sitting there for a long time, and so she came and when she came in in the spirit, she pointed to the cabinet and said, 'this is where the coffee used to be,' and so they came in and saw you and they left. A couple of spirits came and saw you."

NOT EVEN DEATH DO US PART

In September 2009, my paternal grandfather passed away from lung cancer in Fort Worth, Texas. Shortly after, my grandmother— his wife—was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease, and commenced a sharp decline. In late 2010, my grandmother moved in with my parents and me at our new home in Luling, Louisiana, a place where neither one of my grandparents had ever been to prior to my grandmother moving in. This is the story of how, through my grandmother's decline, my mother saw how my grandfather never left my grandmother alone through her sickness, and how they now, together, watch over us.

"... Your paternal grandfather came," my mother said. "That was when your grandmother, your paternal grandmother was living here, and she was sick, and I knew I was

going to have to bring her to the hospital, and so I called your dad to come home and come with me to bring her. And your grandfather came and he was walking with this urgency like, ‘Oh, we gotta hurry up,’ and he was walking fast and I could see him outside the door, the glass door on the side of the house, and you could see his image and I could see his bowlegs and his body movement, and it was him and the dog was barking before he knocked on the door, the dog was barking.”

“Selena?” I asked, to make sure it was my dog and not the neighbors’ dog.

“Selena. I said ‘Selena, what’s the matter, girl, why are you barking like that?’ I looked out the window, I didn’t see anything [else], so then I saw his figure walk up to door, bang on the door, really hard like, ‘Bang! Bang! Bang!’ with this urgency— and so I could not see anybody and so he was gone, I guess, maybe he came in and sat with her. There have been times when I felt his presence in that room with her. So, when we brought her to the hospital, your dad saw him walking down the hallway, and when she was in the nursing home later, your dad saw him leaning up against the wall with one foot up against the hall, and he went to talk to him, he was gone. On one particular occasion, I heard her talking, your grandmother, and I opened the door and the presence was so thick, and I completely felt like I interrupted an intimate moment between a husband and a wife at an intimate time, and it was really weird. I opened the door, and I felt that, and she turned around and she looked at me, and I went, ‘Oh, excuse me,’ and closed the door back up and left. There were times after he passed that you could smell the cigarettes and you could smell it around you. And I know that he had been by on more than one occasion.”

“I never knew what cigarettes he smoked, but I can always tell, like, it’s like really strong,” I said. “Earlier this year, I fell asleep in dad’s ‘man cave’ and I was like in one of those things where I’m kind of think I was asleep, but I’m not asleep, and I’m stuck and I can’t move my body or anything and I was lying there and like everything was our house with all the stuff in it, but it felt empty, but it was like weird and blurry and empty at the same time. It was like I was here, but not here, and I couldn’t move, but I could see in this room that we’re in now [the living room] and I was scared for a while because I felt this thing keep trying to creep into the house or something, and then out of nowhere—I just try to stay in peace and reflect on God and everything—I felt dad’s parents like they were in the living room but I couldn’t ‘see them-see them’ because I was in the man cave, but I could ‘see them,’ you know what I mean?”

“Yes,” my mother said.

“And I could smell the cigarette smoke and I felt like I could smell her, but he has this really overpowering cigarette smoke.”

She nodded, “Yeah.”

“And I could hear whispering, and I feel like I could hear him, because you know how he had kind of like a raspy voice with a bit of an accent, you couldn’t really hear him that well, but I kept hearing the words increasing in volume over and over ‘She’s not supposed to be here. She’s NOT supposed to be here. She’s NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE!’ and then like I was finally able to scream, ‘Jesus!’ and then I woke up, but it was like ‘waking up’ without ‘waking up’ because my eyes, I never felt my physical eyes open [when ‘waking up,’ but I felt like my eyes opened. Like, my eyes were wide open like they are now, but it was like some other eyelid moved, I don’t know,” I laughed. “I don’t know why I’m saying this like there’s a whole bunch of eyelids, but it was like a sheet removed or something.”

FEELINGS OF UNSTEADINESS

The conversation continued:

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard people say that people who can see spirits are born with a veil over their face, but when you see the spirits, it’s like a veil is removed,” my mother said.

“Yeah,” I said.

“You can be in one room and see another room as it is without getting up to go in that room. You can see activity, things, going on in that room...”

“I have that quite often, and your mother says she has that too.”

“Yeah, she does, she does.”

“So, I kind of want to go back to Aline Street, because that was kind of like a hotbed for —”

“Yeah, it is,” she laughed.

“It is indeed,” I said.

“It seems like maybe New Orleans in general. I wouldn’t say it’s just New Orleans, because I’ve had experiences here [Luling, LA], but it seems more frequent in New Orleans.”

“Do you feel that unsteadiness and uneasiness here?”

“Not here, but sometimes when we go to Destrehan, when we go near that plantation. Sometimes, it’s just creepy. I don’t know if I want to necessarily say ‘evil’— but, yeah, evil—I mean I’ve seen like this Antebellum lady standing there, it was this white lady—I don’t know if it’s OK to say that.” We both laughed. She continued, “But I’ve also seen ghosts, spirits, like there was this lady walking across the road and she was this African American lady, black lady, and a black man and he had on these jeans with a rope for a belt tied on his waist and they were walking past each other, and one was walking from the plantation and the other was walking from the side where the river was and they were walking past each other, and I didn’t want to hit them in the road, but I realized they were spirits in the fog,”

“Ugh, I hate that fog!” I yelled.

“Yeah, me too, that thick fog, and then sometimes there isn’t any fog until you get to that plantation and there they were, in the fog, and disappeared.”

“I went there today,” I said.

“Yeah? At the *spooky* library?”

“Yeah.”

“Who gave them the idea to put a library there?”

“I don’t know. But, when we think about death, and especially with being Christian and having the idea that you either go to heaven or hell, how does that fit in to the fact that we see these spirits years later?”

“I really did not know how that fit in with biblical beliefs, because we believed that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, but at the same time you realize, the Lord is present everywhere. I don’t know how that fits in because some people will tell you that if you see spirits, these are not the spirits of the people who passed, these are evil spirits deceiving you—I don’t think so. I mean, there may be instances of some evil thing or something trying to convince you—I have had a dream that there was a demon pretending to be your dad, but it was indeed a dream, and this was just before he got baptized... He was red, at one point he was green, and— let me see if I can remember the details of the dream because this was before you were born—he was getting baptized, your dad was raised Catholic, but at some point he wanted to get baptized in a Baptist Church as he started to develop a closer relationship with God. At some point, he felt he was missing something that he did not get with the Catholic religion and the night before the baptism was to take place, I had the dream. Usually, the person whose getting baptized has the dream of some demonic thing trying to bother them. So, this thing was

red, it was just the head, his head. He kept trying to kiss me, and I kept pushing him away until finally I said, 'Get away in the name of Jesus!' and then I could see the thing sitting down with no head— cut off—then, I saw this table and the table was all white, and it seemed like whatever the food that was on there was just plentiful, bountiful, and I was given this piece of bread and it was the whitest bread that I had ever seen, and I was eating this bread and it was understood that I had won a victory over the demon and that I was being rewarded, or blessed, or given this bread as symbolic of this victory and receiving of the spirit, and that was all I can recall of that particular dream."

"Did I have any weird stuff happen when I was getting Baptized?"

"... let me see if I could remember what it was... I know that you used to like... I don't know, I don't wanna bring that up," she said.

"What?"

"Just a presence of a certain person, and I don't want to name names, or anything like that. They used to talk to you, and bother you, but you're over that and I don't wanna bring that up... yeah, there's some weird things in that house sometimes..."

"I wanna know, but I don't wanna know, I'm scared."

"Leave it."

"Well, that explains why I have so many repressed memories."

"Yeah."

It was here that I chose to end the interview. I felt uncomfortable with the information that was given to me in that last section, and decided it was best not to press forward with the interview.